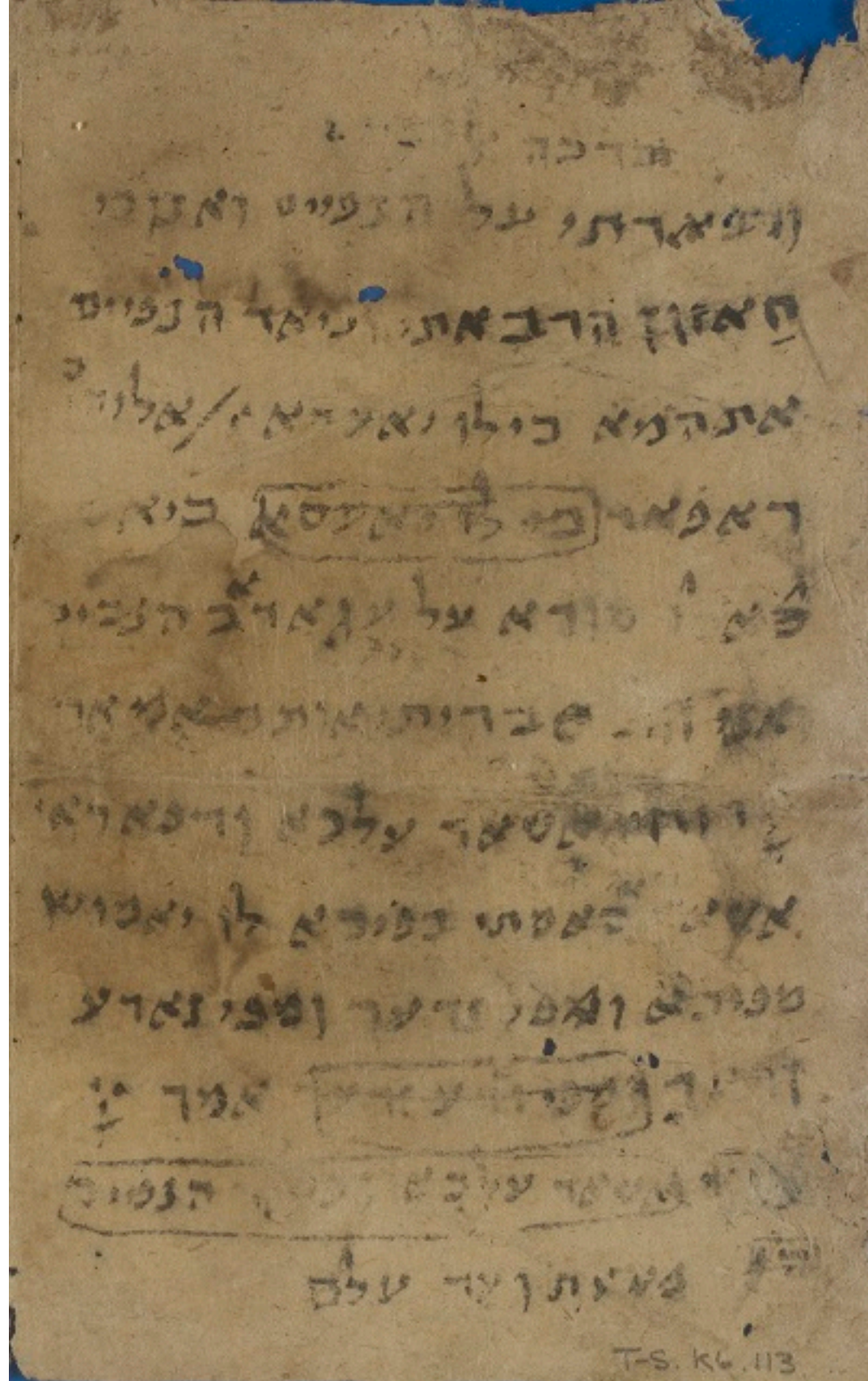


Fragment of the Month: October 2018

The strange Hebrew of a blessing for the Prophets: T-S K6.113

Nadia Vidro

Biblical verses used in medieval texts of various genres often exhibit spellings different from those of the Masoretic text. The majority of these deviations are relatively minor and involve the plene spelling of vowels that are written defectively in the biblical text. Recently, I came across a curious text consisting of three biblical verses written with drastic deviations from the standard biblical spelling. The text, preserved in T-S K6.113, fol. 2v, contains a blessing for the reading of the haftarah. It is entitled 'the blessing for the Prophets' and made up of Hosea 12:11, Amos 3:7, Isaiah 59:21. The text is written in a careful hand that makes the impression of being not very experienced in writing Hebrew.



T-S K6.113 folio 2 verso

Below I present the text as it is found in the fragment, juxtaposing it with the same verses in the MT. Underlined text has a box drawn around it in the original fragment, deleting it.

T-S K6.113, fol. 2v

MT

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

11.

12.

13.

ברכת אל[נפ]יים

ודבארתי על הנפיים ואנוכי

חאזון הרבאטי ופיאד הנפיים

אתהמא כי לו יאעסא :| אלוהים

דאפאר כי לו יאעסא כיאם

פִּגְלוֹ(?) סודא על עואד^אב הנבים

ואני זות ס?ברית אותם אמאר

יִי רוחי אשאר עלכא ודפאראי

אשא[ר] א[?]סאמתי בפיכא לו יאמושו

מפיכא ומפי זרעך ומפי זארע

זרעך ומפי זארע זרעך אמר יִי

וְדַבַּרְתִּי עַל-הַנְּבִיאִים וְאֵנֹכִי

חֲזוֹן הַרְבֵּיתִי וּבִיד הַנְּבִיאִים

אֲדַמָּה כִּי לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה אֲדָנִי יְהוָה

דָּבַר כִּי אִם-

גָּלָה סוּדוֹ אֶל-עַבְדֵּיו הַנְּבִיאִים

וְאֵנִי זֹאת בְּרִיתִי אוֹתָם אֶמַר

יְהוָה רוּחִי אֲשֶׁר עָלֶיךָ וְדַבַּרִּי

אֲשֶׁר-שָׁמַתִּי בְּפִיךָ לֹא-יִמּוּשׁוּ

מִפִּיךָ וּמִפִּי זֶרַעַךָ וּמִפִּי זֶרַע

זֶרַעַךָ אֶמַר יְהוָה

מֵעַתָּה וְעַד-עוֹלָם

A number of non-standard spelling features are conspicuous in the fragment:

1. Long qamaṣ, pataḥ, seghol and ṣere are in most cases represented by the mater lectionis aleph: חֲזוֹן for חִזוֹן (l. 3), וְדַבַּרְתִּי for וּדְבַרְתִּי (l. 2), אֲשֶׁר for אִשָּׁר (l. 8), הַרְבֵּיתִי for הִרְבֵּאתִי (l. 3). Holam is also occasionally represented by aleph, e.g. סוּדָא for סוּדוֹ (l. 6) but it is more commonly represented by waw. Short vowels are not represented by matres lectionis.
2. Quiescent aleph is not represented: לוֹ for לֹא (l. 4), זֹת for זֹאת (l. 7).
3. Fricative bet is commonly represented by peh: הַנְּבִיאִים for הַנְּפִיִּים (l. 2), דַּפָּאֵר for דָּבַר (l. 5). Fricative bet is once represented by waw: עַבְדֵּיו for עוֹבְדֵיב (l. 6). In the same word consonantal waw is represented by bet.
4. Sin is represented by samekh: יַעֲשֶׂה for יַעֲסֵה (l. 4), שָׁמַתִּי for סַאמַתִּי (l. 9).

5. Plosive gimel is originally represented by kaph, which is crossed out and a gimel is added on top: גִּלְהּ for גֶּלֶה (l. 6)

6. Fricative dalet is once written with tav and heh: אַתְהֵמָא for אֲדַמָּה (l. 4), possibly to indicate aspiration.

Strange as it may appear upon first glance, this spelling is not random. In fact, features 1–5 are regularly attested in Karaite and Muslim transcriptions of Biblical Hebrew into Arabic script. In the 10th and 11th centuries Karaite scholars in Palestine transcribed biblical texts into Arabic script. The purpose of these transcriptions was to preserve the reading tradition of the Bible as opposed to its consonantal text. It appears that our fragment is a re-transcription of the blessing from the Arabic into the Hebrew script. It may have been penned by someone preparing to publicly read the haftarah.

That the text is copied from a Vorlage rather than from memory is shown by scribal errors of dittography: the passages marked for deletion in lines 5 and 11–12 are repetitions of text written on the previous line caused by the writer's eye jumping up, e.g. from the second to the first כִּי in Amos 3:7.

The Karaite connection of the text is indicated by the rest of the bi-folio, although it is copied in a different, more skilled hand than 'the blessing for the Prophets'. T-S K6.113, fols 1v–2r contain a florilegium of biblical verses on the themes of study, the Torah and the commandments, including Isaiah 50:4, Psalms 119:18, Deuteronomy 6:25 and Psalms 147:2, etc. This florilegium is contrasted in the fragment with the Rabbanite 'blessing for the Torah', בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בָּנוּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים וְנָתַן לָנוּ אֶת תּוֹרָתוֹ. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה, suggesting that the florilegium itself is Karaite.

Bibliography

Frank, D. (2003). 'Karaite prayer and liturgy', in M. Polliack (ed.), *Karaite Judaism: a guide to its history and literary sources* (Brill: Leiden, Boston), pp. 559–589.

Goldberg, P. (1957). *Karaite Liturgy and its Relation to Synagogue Worship* (Manchester University Press).

Khan, G. (1990). *Karaite Bible Manuscripts from the Cairo Genizah* (Cambridge University Press).

Khan, G. (2013). 'Transcriptions into Arabic Script: Medieval Karaite Sources', in G. Khan (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*. Consulted online on 15 October 2018. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2212->

Outhwaite, B. (2000). A Descriptive Grammar of the Medieval Hebrew of the Cairo Geniza Letters (unpublished doctoral thesis). <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.17175>

If you enjoyed this Fragment of the Month, you can find others here.

Contact us: genizah@lib.cam.ac.uk

The zoomable images are produced using Cloud Zoom, a jQueryimage zoom plugin:

Cloud Zoom, Copyright (c) 2010, R Cecco, www.professorcloud.com
Licensed under the MIT License